

# Broad Leaf Farm: A Solar Dream Come True



Dusty of Broad Leaf Farm was able to turn a long-time interest in solar energy into reality.

Broad Leaf Farm is a long-established family farm located in Everson, Washington, that sells certified organic vegetables and berries. The owner, Dusty Williams, had been interested in solar energy since the 1970's when he lived in an off-grid, solar-powered trailer. However, when he was able to purchase his own farm property and house in 1988 the cost of solar was still too expensive to do on a large scale. Instead, Dusty turned his attention to other sustainable farming practices and put his solar dreams on hold.

Since 2008 the price of solar panels has dropped by more than 50% nationwide. In addition, many states, utilities, and government agencies offer grants or other financial incentives to bring down the up-front cost. Low-interest loans for solar are also becoming more common, making solar more affordable now than ever before.

Dusty was so busy farming that he wasn't paying attention to the solar market and price trends, until he listened to a presentation by Northwest Sustainable Energy for Economic Development (Northwest SEED) on the current state of the technology and economics. Once Dusty learned of recent declines in solar panel prices and the availability of state and federal incentives, he acted quickly. The 8.6 kW solar electric system was installed in July 2014 and supplies about 25% of the farm's electricity needs, reducing utility bills as well as reducing this organic farm's environmental footprint.



Northwest SEED provides technical assistance and grant-writing support for farmers and rural small businesses interested in renewable energy or energy efficiency. For more information contact: [www.nwseed.org](http://www.nwseed.org) | ph: 206.328.2441 | [info@nwseed.org](mailto:info@nwseed.org) | 1402 3rd Ave Suite 901, Seattle, Washington

# Tahoma Farms Solar: Good Economic Sense



In 2009 Dan and Kim Hulse purchased one of three parcels at Orting Valley Farms, a 100-acre former dairy preserved by the PCC Farmland Trust in collaboration with the Washington State Wildlife & Recreation Program and Pierce County Conservation Futures Program. The PCC Farmland Trust secured a conservation easement on the land, ensuring that it is saved for organic production forever and making it affordable to a new generation of farmers. Dan and Kim chose “Tahoma Farms” as the name for their 40-acre parcel in homage to the Native American name for Mount Rainier, which rises majestically 30 miles to the southeast.

Dan was initially interested in solar to power an irrigation pump that was too far from the existing electrical grid. He contacted Northwest Sustainable Energy for Economic Development (Northwest SEED) to inquire about different options for his situation. That’s when Dan learned that it would be a better economic investment to install a much larger grid-connected solar electric system. In addition to a 30% federal tax credit and business depreciation benefits, Dan received a 25% grant from the USDA’s Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) and receives about \$5,000 a year in Washington State production incentive payments. The farm also gets to use the solar-generated electricity, reducing annual operating expenses.

Although Tahoma Farm’s 9.7 kW solar electric system cost over \$50,000 up-front, Dan was able to secure a zero-money-down, low-interest loan from his bank, Puget Sound Cooperative Credit Union. With the grant, tax benefits, and state incentive, Dan will be able to pay off his loan within 5 years and enjoy the benefits of solar equipment that comes with a 25 year warranty. Not all farm investments make such good economic sense.

Tahoma Farms is committed to organic production practices, including long-term crop rotations, planting green manures, and utilizing compost to build the soil. In the same way that they are growing a sustainable farm, Dan and Kim are growing a business that will strengthen the local food economy and nourish their community for years to come. They are proud that solar energy is now a part of both their environmental and business sustainability efforts.



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